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INTERPRETIVE REPORT

CIA Active in Viet Nam

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TOKYO, Oct. 8 (AP).

When John Richardson began his assignment as chief of the United States Central Intelligence Agency unit in South Viet Nam, he had to use Buddhist monks to chase the ghosts out of his villa.

The specter of a different kind of Buddhist ghost has been a major factor in Mr. Richardson's recall to Washington.

In fact, all the American spooks (intelligence men) in South Viet Nam have come under close and critical scrutiny — not only from the Saigon government but from United States State Department officials as well. A new man with a new mission may soon occupy the small office on the second floor of the embassy, where Mr. Richardson worked.

Mr. Richardson's recall is believed partly the result of a disagreement over tactics with Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who came to Saigon in August.

Plot Is Charged

President Ngo Dinh Diem and his family have charged that the CIA actually plotted a coup to overthrow his government last month. The United States Embassy called the charge nonsense.

Behind endless charges and countercharges, how much of a role have American intelligence agencies had in developments in Viet Nam?

Under former Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., Mr. Richardson and his men had a key role. As special assistant to the Ambassador he was a close friend and confidante of most of the Saigon government's top officials, including those in the secret police.

Mr. Richardson and the 200 or so CIA agents under his

command were in on the grand strategy for the Communist insurgency. Saigon headlines. Special Forces in South Viet Nam were a military arm of the CIA. Later, Special Forces were transferred to the United States Military Assistance Command headed by Gen. Paul Harkins, and became a separate unit.

Arm of CIA

Special Forces had a vital part in securing Viet Nam's jungle-covered highlands. Six-man teams in some areas administer entire villages of thousands of primitive tribesmen. Special Forces men have suffered heavy casualties.

At another level Mr. Richardson worked closely with Ngo Dinh Nhu, Mr. Diem's aggressive brother and chief adviser. Mr. Nhu and Mr. Richardson planned American aid for the strategic hamlet program.

In a recent interview, Mr. Nhu pointedly recalled that his Special Forces that smashed Buddhist pagodas August 21 were created by the United States.

In Earlier Campaigns.

Mr. Richardson is bald, wears glasses with heavy horn rims, dresses smartly and conservatively, and looks and acts every bit the diplomat. He is a specialist in counterinsurgency, having fought Communist guerrillas for his agency in Greece and the Philippines. Both campaigns were ultimately successful.

Things were going well for Mr. Richardson until August 21, when the smouldering Buddhist crisis exploded into violence and martial law. The United States denounced Saigon's actions, and a favorite

question became: "What will the CIA do about it?"

The finger of Government suspicion was immediately aimed at Mr. Richardson and all American intelligence groups, even though there was no evidence the CIA planned to do anything at all.

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